on the COVER

Growing up to 12-feet tall, the Giant Leather Fern is North America's largest native fern

Outreach efforts engage local residents, businesses and community groups by hosting public meetings and workshops

A researcher opens a control valve for a pump that moves water into phosphorus-removal test cells

Environmental scientists frequently take measurements such as temperature, dissolved oxygen and conductivity

Engineers and scientists from as far away as Japan visit the District to study Everglades restoration and other water management challenges

Farmers Extend Helping Hand

A fourth-generation citrus farmer with family roots in southwest Florida, Hugh English takes great pride in the continuing contribution of the agricultural community toward preserving the traditional values of a vanishing rural lifestyle – which includes respect and appreciation for the environment.

"Farmers know that to have a good neighbor you have to be a good neighbor."

– Hugh English
Governing Board Member

When I was growing up in Alva, farming was considered a tough, but honorable, career choice. My first work experience was doing chores and helping out on our family grove. Now retired after more than 35 years of active involvement in the agricultural industry, and related industry organizations, I feel that I made the right decision.

In addition to providing food for our tables, farmers are also natural stewards of the land. With limited resources in a very competitive industry, farmers strive to manage land in a manner that will preserve it for future generations to enjoy.

Farmers are natural risk-takers. An adequate water supply and good water management are the lifeblood of the agricultural industry. Tremendous resources are devoted to state-of-the-art irrigation systems and the infrastructure to provide drainage when needed. With well-defined wet and dry seasons, Florida is a "wet desert." Both seasons' water management issues have to be addressed.

The farmers' commitment to conservation and preservation of our natural resources remains strong. Often cast in the villain role when it comes to environmental concerns, in reality the agricultural community is typically a key player in helping to develop and implement solutions to our most pressing water and land use problems.

Case in point: the Lake Toho drawdown.

The environmental community was not willing for the drawdown water to be stored in Lake Okeechobee due to the high water level in the lake. The coastal communities were adamantly opposed to additional flood control releases to the estuaries following the heavy discharges earlier in the year.

Recognizing the urgent need to move forward with the twice-postponed Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission project to enhance the lake habitat, farmers responded when the call came out for alternative water storage sites. The flexibility inherent in agriculture is evident in contrast to the lack of flexibility in government rules and regulations that reduces the options available to District staff.

Accessing potential storage is not a simple task. Much careful thought and planning is necessary before modifications are made to utilize nontraditional storage. In partnership with the District, temporary pumps were installed, facility modifications were made and necessary maintenance was performed (with District financial assistance) to achieve the desired surface storage goal.

Hugh English at work on his family's citrus grove in the late 1940s.

The farmers didn't do this because they need the water for ongoing operations. The storage project required investing unplanned time and resources as well as assuming risk in utilizing storage that would be needed if this spring's weather conditions were similar to last year's wet conditions. It was done in a spirit of cooperation to solve a contentious problem.

Farmers know that to have a good neighbor you have to be a good neighbor. This is a good example of this aspect of rural philosophy. The contrast is the continuous litigation or threat of litigation that surrounds so many of the water, land use and environmental issues today.

Whose philosophy would you prefer?

2004 Everglades Consolidated Report Available

Annual report documents sound science, restoration progress, technologies

The South Florida Water Management District, in partnership with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, announces publication of the *2004 Everglades Consolidated Report*, sixth in an annual series. Compiled to satisfy reporting requirements of the Everglades Forever Act, this extensive, peer-reviewed report documents the scientific soundness and strong performance of numerous programs leading to Everglades restoration.

This past year saw continued positive progress. Florida adopted a stringent, science-based standard for phosphorus of 10 parts per billion in water entering the Everglades Protection Area south of Lake Okeechobee. To help achieve this, the District has built the largest system of constructed wetlands in the world in Palm Beach and Hendry counties. To date, these treatment marshes, aided by improved farming techniques known as best management practices, have prevented 1,400 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades. A common ingredient in agricultural and urban fertilizers, excess amounts of phosphorus cause an imbalance in the natural populations of plant and animal life in the Everglades.

Also in 2003, the Florida Legislature approved the District's Long-Term Plan for Achieving Water Quality Goals, designed to further reduce phosphorus levels while integrating water quality improvement efforts with ecosystem restoration programs.

The entire *2004 Everglades Consolidated Report* — a colorfully illustrated, 32-page executive summary, main scientific report and supporting appendices — is available on the District's web site (www.sfwmd.gov/org/ema/everglades). Printed copies are available by calling the District's Technical Publications office at (561) 682-6745.

Supreme Court Hears Arguments in S-9 case

In a historic event with nationwide implications, legal arguments were presented to the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., January 14 by lawyers representing the South Florida Water Management District and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians. The S-9 case will define precisely who the U.S. Congress intended to target when it passed the Clean Water Act.

"The intent of the law is aimed squarely at industrial polluters who actively add contaminants to the nation's water, not to public water agencies merely moving water throughout an interconnected system for public good," said District Governing Board Chair Nicolás Gutiérrez. "In addition, a needless permit-by-permit regulatory approach would provide no additional environmental benefit and, in fact, could delay and even derail the Congressionally approved plan to restore and revitalize America's Everglades."

A ruling is expected this spring. For additional background information, visit www.sfwmd.gov and click on "Supreme Court Case."